

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

241407Z Apr 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001660

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV OEXC KISL KU

SUBJECT: EDUCATION REFORM: NEW KUWAITI TEXTBOOKS BY 2006

(SBU) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Ref: 2004 Kuwait 003855

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador, accompanied by CAO, met with Kuwait's Minister of Higher Education Dr. Rashid Al-Hamed on April 9, 2005. Discussion focused on reform of the educational system and textbooks. In previous meetings with Emboffs, ministry officials have said that the Ministry's strategy on textbook reform is to get out of the textbook publishing business, with the introduction of new textbooks in math, science and English by September 2006 or, at the latest, 2007. New Arabic-language, history, religion and social science textbooks would be introduced after that. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Recent Kuwaiti press reports have focused on Ministry of Education plans for reform of its education curricula and textbooks. Textbooks are being vetted with the aim of ensuring more tolerant and less anti-Western content in the Arabic, social science, history and religion textbooks. Ministry officials say the need for education reform is primarily to improve Kuwaiti education and the quality of teachers in Kuwait as well as to lessen potentially inflammatory content in textbooks.

Textbook Reform

¶3. (SBU) The Minister (and Ministry Undersecretary, Dr. Humoud Al-Saadoun) have described the Ministry's strategy as to get out of the textbook-publishing business. The first round of textbook reforms are intended to introduce new Arabic-language textbooks into the schools by September 2006 or 2007 in math and science, from Harcourt publishing. Kuwait and Harcourt are doing this in cooperation with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. They are working together with the publisher to ensure that the Harcourt-published Arabic texts are culturally appropriate for the Gulf. Concurrently, English teaching texts would come from Longman publications. New Arabic, history, religion and social science textbooks would be completed later because, in the Kuwaiti view, there are no suitable international publishers in these fields. Also, the Ministry officials say that these subjects are more sensitive and reform of such books will need more time. It is also possible, according to the Kuwaitis, that the Emirates and Yemen will join Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in the first round of new textbook acquisition in English, math and science through the Harcourt and Longman publishing houses.

Religious Texts

¶4. (SBU) While not going into details, the Minister conceded to the Ambassador that there is a need to review and revise religious textbooks for content which may promote ideas of extremism and which, more generally, promotes "bad relations" with other, non-Muslim, religious groups and societies. Likewise, the Minister said that some religious texts are offensive to students from Kuwait's Shi'a community. The Minister told the Ambassador that the Ministry is interested in balancing the religious sensitivities of the Sunni and Shi'a communities by removing the stresses on the differences in belief between the two groups. In the categories of Sunni-Shi'a as well as Muslim - non-Muslim relations, the Minister stressed the importance of carefully selecting which authors should be chosen for religious education, as religious textbooks reflect the biases of their authors.

Increasing the Number of Kuwaiti Students in the U.S.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador advised the Minister that increasing the numbers of Kuwaitis studying in the United States is a high mission priority. The Minister said that he supports the Ambassador's request that the Ministry of Higher Education allow AMIDEAST to hold occasional voluntary presentations in Kuwaiti secondary schools for students and parents on educational opportunities in the

U.S. This pledge followed a similar pledge made to the DCM by the Undersecretary of the Education Ministry the previous week. Though no such briefings have taken place as of April, 2005, post is following-up with the Ministry of Education and AMIDEAST to ensure that one or two such sessions take place this semester.

Comment

¶16. (SBU) Kuwait since the 1960's and 1970's has become much more conservative as Islamist politicians have increased their profile and power through the National Assembly and other segments of society. In this context, PAS contacts in the intellectual community describe education reform as the most necessary field in which to reverse the level of conservatism in society--especially among targeted youth. In addition to the important decision made by the GOK and the Education Ministry to proceed with textbook reform, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has undertaken educational and training programs for imams to try to further prevent creeping Islamist extremism in Kuwait. PAS Kuwait is working with ECA and the Islamic Affairs Ministry to put together a Single-Country Program for FY-2005 to send 5 to 7 imams to visit the U.S. to get a better understanding, first-hand, of U.S. society and values. End comment.